



# Arizona Department of Agriculture

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## ***MEDIA ADVISORY*** ***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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### **Warning! West Nile Virus Season Here: Horse Owners Need to Vaccinate**

(Phoenix) -- Nearly one year ago (April 20, 2005), Arizona experienced its first West Nile Virus case in a horse for the 2005 season, but a vaccine is available to protect horses. However, the vaccine must be given before the animal is infected and that is why horse owners need to contact their veterinarians to schedule vaccinations as soon as possible. Unlike humans, horses are protected from the disease through a simple vaccination.



#### **How do horses become infected with West Nile virus?**

The same way humans become infected-by the bite of infectious mosquitoes. The mosquitoes become infected after feeding on an infected bird. Mosquitoes cannot transmit West Nile virus by feeding on an infected horse.

#### **Has West Nile virus caused severe illness or death in horses?**

Following transmission by an infected mosquito, West Nile virus, may cause a mild transient self resolving fever or it may infect the brain causing inflammation or "encephalitis". The vast majority of horses that are bitten by infected mosquitoes do not become ill, but those that develop severe encephalitis often die. Recovered horses often suffer from residual damage to their nervous system.

#### **Can I get infected with West Nile virus by caring for an infected horse?**

West Nile virus is transmitted by infectious mosquitoes. The infected horse is not contagious to humans or to other horses. Normal infection control precautions should be followed when caring for a sick horse.

#### **Can a horse infected with West Nile virus infect horses in neighboring stalls?**

No. There is no documented evidence that West Nile virus is transmitted between horses.

#### **Are there other sleeping sickness diseases I should vaccinate for?**

Yes! Sleeping Sickness, or Western Equine Encephalomyelitis (WEE), is caused by a virus transmitted by mosquitoes in various locations in Arizona nearly every year. West Nile Virus (WNV), a new variety of Sleeping Sickness, was first identified in the eastern U.S. in 1999.

WEE in horses closely mimics West Nile Virus: It is transmitted via mosquitoes that have fed on infected birds, and the symptoms are nearly identical. We typically refer to this type of disease as “sleeping sickness” because the effects of the virus in the brain often make the animal act “sleepy”.

**What is the result of WEE, if left untreated, in livestock?**

Horses will act “dumb” or may die, as this infection causes inflammation in the brain. This disease, like West Nile Virus, is preventable through a simple vaccination.

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